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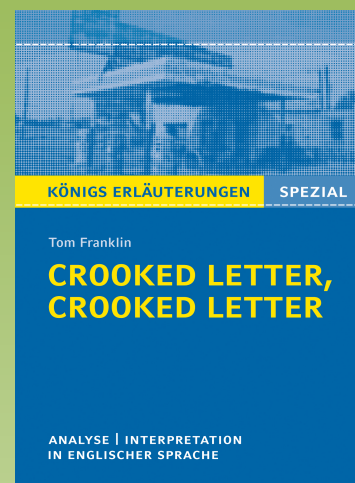
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Auszug aus:

Franklin, Tom: Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter

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1. AT A GLANCE

This study guide to Tom Franklin's *Crooked Letter*, *Crooked Letter* is designed to provide an easy-to-use overview of the structure, context, themes and characters of the novel. Here is a quick rundown of the most important points.

Part 2 takes a brief look at Tom Franklin and his career.

- ⇒ S. 9 → Franklin was born in Alabama in 1963. His career as a writer has been defined by the region of the country in which he was born and has always lived.
- ⇒ S. 10 → *Crooked Letter* is a crime thriller about two boyhood friends who are in fact half-brothers. Franklin is closely associated with the American South.

Part 3 offers analyses and interpretations of the novel.

Crooked Letter – Origins and sources

- ⇒ S. 16 Franklin is a Southern writer: all his published works have been concerned with the history and culture of the American South. *Crooked Letter* was published in 2010 and was his third and to date most successful novel.

Summaries

- ⇒ S. 18 Two young boys, Larry and Silas, become friends despite social and family pressure (Larry is white, Silas black) in rural Mississippi in the late 1970s. A girl they are both connected to, Cindy Walker, disappears, feared dead, and suspicion falls on Larry. Twenty-five years later, Larry is an outcast in the area, and Silas is now a police officer, investigating the disappearance of a lo-

cal girl, Tina Rutherford. Larry is again a suspect, even after he is found shot and badly wounded in his own home. Silas investigates the crime and is forced to re-examine his own history, and to acknowledge the secrets he has been keeping about Cindy. He had been with her on the night she disappeared and he could have saved Larry from the suspicion which destroyed his family and his life. While investigating the past, Silas also discovers that he and Larry are half-brothers. Silas is badly injured in a showdown with the man who shot Larry and killed Tina. After Silas has confessed about the events of 1982, he and Larry can begin to mend their friendship.

Structure

The novel is concerned with events from the past and their effect on, and reflection in, events occurring in the present day. The narrative takes place in the two time periods, with some chapters taking place entirely in the past, and characters often slipping into long memories which reveal the secrets and events of 25 years ago. ⇨ S. 31

Characters

The arrangement of the characters in *Crooked Letter* is a little more complex than in a less chronologically complex novel. ⇨ S. 52

Larry Ott

→ Larry is an outcast and a loner who comes from a local family. ⇨ S. 52

Silas Jones

→ Silas investigates the crimes in the novel and has to acknowledge his guilt for having ruined Larry's life. ⇨ S. 55

- ⇒ S. 57 **Carl Ott**
→ Larry's father had an affair with Alice Jones, and Silas is his son.
- ⇒ S. 58 **Ina Ott**
→ Larry's mother is the last of the earlier generation still alive.
- ⇒ S. 59 **Alice Jones**
→ Silas' mother, a beautiful, strong-willed and hard woman.
- ⇒ S. 61 **Wallace Strongfellow**
→ Wallace kills Tina Rutherford and shoots Larry.
- ⇒ S. 63 **Cindy Walker**
→ Silas' girlfriend at the time she disappears.
- ⇒ S. 64 **There are many other characters in the novel.**

Themes

- ⇒ S. 74 The themes in this novel are deeply interconnected: **Memory, the past and secrets – Guilt, responsibility and betrayal – Power – Belonging – Horror and monsters – Redemption.**

Style and language

- ⇒ S. 129 The dialogue in the novel reflects the strong local accent of rural Mississippi, providing a real sense of place and identity. The prose is rich with poetic similes and symbolic passages.

Interpretations

- ⇒ S. 136 The novel is primarily a crime thriller, and this chapter will look at where the novel fits in with the literary genre and traditions of crime fiction.

2.1 Biography

2. TOM FRANKLIN: LIFE & WORKS

2.1 Biography

| YEAR | PLACE | EVENT | AGE |
|------|------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1963 | Dickinson, Alabama | Born on 7th of July in the tiny community (400–500 citizens), Franklin grew up as a huge fan of comic books and pulp fiction (science fiction, horror, fantasy, Tarzan stories, etc.) and was not a good student at school. | Up to age 18 |
| 1981 | Mobile, Alabama | The family moved, and Franklin attended the University of South Alabama, where he worked many menial jobs and took nine years to graduate. | 18 |
| 1994 | Selma, Alabama | Taught for a year at the famous all-black Selma University. | 31 |
| 1998 | Fayetteville, Arkansas | He graduated from the University of Arkansas with an M.F.A. after four years which he really enjoyed, during which he also met his future wife Beth Ann. | 35 |
| 1999 | | First work published, the story collection <i>Poachers</i> | 36 |
| 2003 | | First novel published, <i>Hell at the Breech</i> | 40 |
| 2006 | | <i>Smonk</i> is published, cementing his reputation as a regional writer | 43 |
| 2010 | | <i>Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter</i> is published to widespread acclaim and great commercial success | 47 |
| 2013 | | <i>The Titled World</i> is published, a novel Franklin co-wrote with his wife | 50 |
| 2017 | | Tom Franklin is currently an associate professor at the University of Mississippi. | 54 |



Thomas Gerald Franklin (* 1963)
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2.2 Contemporary Background

2.2 Contemporary Background

SUMMARY

Whether he is writing crime fiction or historical novels, Tom Franklin is a regional writer who is closely associated with the American South, specifically the states Alabama and Mississippi. The traditions, lifestyles and landscapes of the South feature prominently in his writing.

The South

The southern states of the USA are very different from the North. Traditional ways of life which were associated for generations with natural factors like different kind of agriculture (the plantations, for example) and the very different climate are combined with historical, political and social factors including slavery, segregation, the American Civil War, widespread religious intensity and a lot of rural poverty. Industrialisation and urbanisation had been northern phenomena long before they began affecting the South.

Southern identity

Franklin addresses many issues of Southern identity and life in *Crooked Letter*, including **racial dynamics**, the coherence and claustrophobia of small rural communities, and **social problems** like drugs, alcoholism and poverty. He also makes efforts to **portray the languid atmosphere** of the hot and humid climate, and there is a strong awareness of beauty in his descriptions of the landscapes of the South.

ChicagoNorth America,
Illinois

Chicago has many nicknames, including the “Windy City” – referring to its chilly and raw climate – and the “City of the Big Shoulders”, which is a line taken from Carl Sandburg’s poem *Chicago* (1916)

3. ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 Origins and sources

SUMMARY

Tom Franklin is widely considered to be a regional, and specifically Southern writer. All of his published work has been set in Mississippi or Alabama, and the region and his experiences there have shaped his work as a writer.

“To write a story, you have to get the details right. You have to convince a reader you know what you’re talking about.”³

(Tom Franklin)

Biographical traces

Franklin’s personal background in the region and his familiarity with the life, landscape, history, people and feel of the South means that there are **traces of his life and experience in his work**. This is also true of *Crooked Letter*: for example, like Larry, he grew up with a father who ran a car repair workshop in a tiny rural community.

He mentions in interviews how much autobiographical detail has slipped into *Crooked Letter*: “the character of Silas ”32” Jones is very loosely based on the sole police officer of the hamlet of Dickinson, Alabama, where I grew up”⁴ and “I used a lot of autobiographical stuff for Larry, the mechanic”⁵. These **autobiographical details** include Larry’s reading habits – when asked in an interview who his

3 <https://www.mswritersandmusicians.com/mississippi-writers/tom-franklin>

4 https://www.amazon.com/Crooked-Letter-Novel/dp/0060594667/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpi_1

5 Ibid.



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